

PEOPLE & THINGS

By ATTICUS

LORD BEAVERBROOK was seventy-six on Wednesday and he celebrated the occasion with a birthday party at Claridges at which, in a speech that crackled with wit, he once again announced his retirement from public life.

Whatever the 8 million readers of the Express Group of newspapers (the combined circulation of the three papers when he bought them was 950,000) may think of this man and his views, history will have to decide whether he or Northcliffe was the greatest newspaperman of this half-century. In the sense that he combines supreme journalistic flair, the rare quality of wonder, and a consuming interest in people and life, with courage and vitality and a point of view about absolutely everything, the verdict may quite possibly go to Lord Beaverbrook.

It is this combination of qualities, together with a true artistic sense, that have produced the beautifully designed, stimulating, surprising, exasperating newspapers of the Express Group and it is the same qualities that have given him the loyalty and affection of one of the happiest staffs in Fleet Street.

Unauthorised Version

WHO will write the life of this remarkable child of the Scottish manse who came from Canada to conquer Fleet Street and who is today the only surviving minister to have served under both Lloyd George and Sir Winston Churchill? Who will be the literary Graham Sutherland who will do for him in words what has been so supremely well done in paint?

Quixotically, Lord Beaverbrook gave Mr. Tom Driberg assistance over a biography which now lies in the safe of Messrs. Weidenfeld and Nicolson while the author, the publisher and the subject parley over certain matters of fact and taste.

But it will need more than one man to write the story of one of the liveliest lives of the century. Among the "diverse hands" there would certainly have to be Sir Winston Churchill on "The Politician," Mr. "Robbie" Robertson on "The Press Lord," Mr. Arthur Christiansen on "The Journalist," and Mr. Stanley Morison on "The Man."

And there would surely have to be one enemy to write the chapter Lord Beaverbrook himself would most enjoy.

At the Opera

THIS year's first cycle of "The Ring" was brought to a triumphant conclusion at Covent Garden the night before last by Mr. Rudolf Kempe, whose direction of the mammoth tetralogy has been generally described as "the best since the war."

What most impressed veteran Wagnerians was the subtlety and discretion of the orchestral playing. Often this was of such delicacy that, as the poet puts it, "Silence was pleased."

When I called upon Mr. Kempe at the Opera House I found, not the tormented and angular maestro dear to novelists, but a large and comfortable young man

who was delighted to find that London agrees with him (and with Wagner), that "Wagner need not be loud to be good."

Nor does Mr. Kempe's taste for delectable sound confine him to Wagner and Strauss. I found, indeed, that he has an unexpected taste for light opera; "Albert Herring" is among his favourites, and Wolf-Ferrari one of the composers he most likes to champion. Perhaps now that he is so firm a favourite in London, the Trustees of Covent Garden might persuade him to introduce to us the delights of minor German opera—Eugen d'Albert's "Tiefland," for instance?

Herman Wouk

HERMAN WOUK, author of "The Caine Mutiny," whose sales in the English language alone already ran into several millions, arrived in London the day before yesterday on his way back to New York after a visit to Israel.

His new novel is finished and he is here to discuss it with his English publishers, Jonathan Cape, and to collect the galley proofs.

The new book is called "Marjorie Morningstar." It is longer even than "The Caine Mutiny" and is a minutely detailed account of the youth of a New York girl. It has already been made the American Book of the Month Club choice for September and Cape's confirm that it has all the mastery of narration which has made Wouk one of the greatest of living storytellers.

The Road to Fame

AFTER graduating from Columbia College in 1934, Wouk spent six years as a back-room boy in a "joke factory" for radio stars, of which the most notable was Fred Allen. He then worked as a dollar-a-year man producing radio shows to sell War Bonds and he has a cheque for eighty-three cents to show for it. Thereafter he served throughout the war in destroyer-minesweepers in the Pacific, and his impulse to write (nowadays in longhand, about four hours daily) came from reading stacks of English classics purchased in a musty New Zealand book store.

Incidentally, "The Caine Mutiny Court Martial," which has done very well on Broadway, will be coming to London in the autumn and will more or less coincide with the publication of "Marjorie Morningstar" here and in America.

Rates for the Job

PENURIOUS British visitors to France may care to note that the awards to those rescuing drowning persons in a public place have been increased. The following tariff is published in the Paris Municipal Bulletin: Rescue from the bank: (1) by outstretched hand, (2) with the help of a gaff, (3) with a rope, £1 10s. per drownee. Rescue from a boat £3 12s. Rescue by swimming: from £5 8s. to £7 4s. (The Bulletin does not make it clear whether this is by weight or distance). Corpses taken in by boat £1 3s.; on the bank £1 2s.

The rescuer should give his name and address and collect when summoned by the local Commissaire of Police.